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Day Care in Europe: The Scandinavian Experience

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There is a general uncertainty of direction. Some mothers feel guilty because they are working, some because they are not. There is ambiguity in policy and in the climate of opinion. The unsupported mother is forced to work, teachers and nurses encouraged to do so. They are praised either for their independence or for their contribution to the economy. But mothers for whom personal or national need is less apparent must work, if they choose to do so, in an atmosphere of disapproval.

— Anthea Holme.

SEVERAL years ago when Barbara Chisholm reported to a Canadian public about day care in Europe she wrote:

Day Care is still often regarded as primarily custodial, oriented to the physical well-being and protection of the child, while nursery education has been conceived with the pre-school readiness of the under 6's, the merging of these two orientations forms the basis for modern progressive day-time programs for children.¹

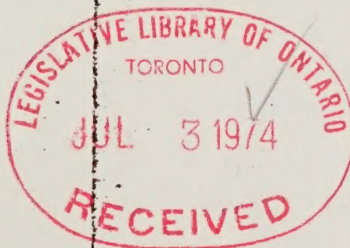
The shaping of expert attitudes toward day care has been a long time in the making not only on this continent but in Europe as well.²

During the late '50's evidence of anaclitic depressions [depression occurring in a person who has a passive, dependent personality], marasmus [extreme starvation] as well as lesser degrees of deprivation syndromes observed in institutionalized children produced an over-reaction against all types of group care.³ Later research findings revealed that maternal separation and deprivation were not identical and that developmental retardation brought about by lack of stimulation and absence of loving care could be reversible with timely intervention. Nevertheless social workers continued to view day

care as a residual resource for special cases. In fact, total separation from family through child placement in foster care made day care the exception.⁴

In recent years a radical change has been taking place in attitudes towards day care, as a result mainly of the obvious pressures for day care brought about by the increased employment of women and particularly married women, but also as a result of the gradual influence of early childhood education specialists who have shown the positive benefits for children's physical, social and intellectual development through properly staffed, well equipped day care centres. In fact a universal concept of day care as a supplement to family care is emerging. The total spectrum includes day nurseries, garderies, crèches, day homes, nursery schools, after-school and leisure time programs, and headstart or kindergarten programs. Comprehensive centres may now provide any or all of these services.

This article is based on a cross-cultural study entitled Women with Family Responsibilities: Their Attachment to the Labour Force, carried out by the author in Europe, from July 1969 to July 1970, on a grant from the Canada Council, while on leave from the Department of National Health and Welfare. The study, which examined policies, practices and attitudes affecting the employment of women with family responsibilities, concentrated on the provision of services which assist in rationalizing and harmonizing women's two roles, at home and at work. The countries observed were the United Kingdom, Holland, Belgium, Switzerland, Sweden, Denmark, Finland and Norway. In this article the Scandinavian experience is examined.



A leading French child psychiatrist has summarized this trend:

...the best possible thing for a child is to remain with his mother, benefiting from her affective and sensory care at first and her educative influence later. However, the problem must not be oversimplified to the extent of imagining that favourable conditions for the child's development are assured only by the presence of his mother. Epidemiological studies have shown in various countries... that child psychiatrists see as many subjects from families in which the mother stays at home as from families in which the mother works...

Probably the social laws relating to working mothers should prolong pregnancy and maternity leave so as to limit the consequence of early and enduring deprivation.

When a working mother knows that her child is well cared for she can return home in the evening in a relatively relaxed frame of mind and give the child more effective care in a short time than she would perhaps do if she felt herself to be the prisoner of the child and overestimated the difficulties of looking after it.⁵

Nevertheless a recent study by the Women's Bureau of the federal Department of Labour⁶ showed that only one per cent of all children of working mothers were cared for in a day nursery or nursery school. In the age group 3-5, three per cent received care in day nurseries or nursery schools.⁷

Women's Liberation groups have made day care a major plank in their platform for social reform but traditionalists still view day care as an undesirable wedge between mother and child. The Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women strongly endorsed the development of a network of day care services and recommended a national Day Care Act for federal support of capital and operating costs of day care centres. In its reference to other countries

the report states "It is quite evident that Canada is far behind in provision of services for pre-school children" (para. 159). But what are the provisions in other countries, and what are the prevailing concepts of day care which affect policies and provisions?

Sweden

Whereas in some countries, Canada and the United States included, the official attitude towards day care has been cautious, on the assumption perhaps that day care will be seized upon as a means of evading maternal responsibility, in Sweden the official view is quite the opposite. It in fact closely resembles the policies of the Eastern European countries where day nurseries are considered social utilities similar to hospitals or schools, i.e., if government has a labour policy to encourage full economic participation, adequate day care provisions must be calculated as a necessary cost.

In fact, in a publication of the Swedish Ministry of Finance on the outlook for the seventies, day nurseries and free-time nurseries are cited as the field expected to expand most rapidly from the years 1964-1970. Actual provisions, however, fall far short of policy and public expectation.

A government-appointed Commission on Day Nurseries reported its findings in the autumn of 1967. Its report revealed *inter alia* that there were, in the autumn of 1966, about 317,000 children under ten years of age, whose mothers were employed for more than 15 hours per week. About 150,000 of these children were under seven years of age. The same survey showed that there were more than 200,000 mothers with children under ten who were prepared to go out to work if they could arrange for adequate supervision of their 350,000 children.

Après quelques considérations d'ordre général sur l'évolution des attitudes sociales relatives aux garderies, et sur les facteurs qui ont amené à concevoir ces services comme supplément à la famille et leur rôle dans l'épanouissement de l'enfance, l'auteur décrit les différentes réalisations dans ce domaine, en Suède, au Danemark, en Finlande et en Norvège. La politique sociale de la Suède, en étroite liaison avec la politique du travail, accorde une haute priorité au problème de la garde de jour des enfants des mères qui travaillent. Le présent article est extrait d'une étude qui s'intitule « Les femmes ayant des responsabilités familiales : leur participation à la main-d'oeuvre », que l'auteur a entreprise grâce à une subvention du Conseil des Arts du Canada.

Indeed, since the beginning of the sixties there has been a growing demand for day care facilities for children.

Day care facilities in Sweden include crèches (*daghem*) or all-day institutions accepting preschool children.

Municipal Family Day Nurseries (familjedadaghem): Children are placed under the care of a woman who cares for them in her own home. The 900 local authorities arrange the contacts and where necessary pay part of the fee. These Municipal Family Day Nurseries have accommodation for about 10,000 children. There are also private family day nurseries, where the arrangements are entirely between the parent(s) and the nursery. It has been estimated that these nurseries care for six times as many children as the Municipal Family Day Nurseries.⁸

Afternoon Homes (fritidshem): These are recreation centres for free days and after-school periods. Here children can have a meal, do their homework and play. These recreation centres however have room for only 5,000 children.

The Common Day Nursery (gimensam barnstuga): This combines the day nursery with a play school (see below). It accepts children who require both longer and shorter periods of supervision. These facilities are

generally run by the local authorities or communes but they are also provided by private industry, hospitals and other institutions.

Play Schools (leksskolor): These are similar to the nursery schools of North America and accept pre-school children for part of the day. But since Swedish children do not compulsorily attend school before the age of seven, the play schools generally cater to the 4 to 6 age group (the kindergarten to Grade I age group).⁹ These are rarely used by working parents. There are about 32,000 places in these schools which care for an estimated 64,000 to 70,000 children, allowing for turnover.

The Swedish labour shortage, which began in the early sixties, stimulated interest in day care supervision for children. In 1963, new regulations were issued which resulted in some expansion.

It will be seen from the table that substantial expansion and change took place between the years 1965 and 1967. Another striking feature shown by this table is the persistent difference between the number of establishments in day nurseries which serve working mothers and the nursery schools, which on the whole do not. A commission which examined the long-term prospects of women in the labour force estimated that

Facilities for Care of Children in Sweden — 1962-1967

Year	Children's Homes		Summer Camps		Day Nurseries*		Nursery School	
	Est.	Beds	Est.	Childn Rec.	Est.	Cap.	Est.	Cap.
1962	210	4,467	524	30,525	304	10,276	1,183	45,88
1963	219	4,301	492	28,316	310	10,340	1,233	44,35
1964	208	3,993	478	27,303	343	11,088	1,320	51,68
1965	236	4,448	459	25,934	374	11,924	1,479	55,11
1966	227	4,137	440	25,260	439	13,402	1,626	69,76
1967	—	—	—	—	505	16,104	207**	3,59

* Daghem

** Excludes nursery schools without government subsidies.

Source: Yearbook of Nordic Statistics 1968, Table 122.

30,000 married women would come into the labour market each subsequent year for several years and that not a few of them would be mothers of small children.

In order to increase the rate of expansion of day nurseries, state subsidies for the building of new premises were raised considerably as of July 1, 1966; this accounts for the increase noted in the table above. During 1968 the government was planning a bill for a further increase of state support by 40 per cent, in order to provide 10,000 new places in each of the years 1968 and 1969. It is anticipated that by 1975 there will be 100,000 additional places.

The present Minister of the Family (herself a young mother of four) is most vigorous in asserting the need for planning day care facilities of high quality in sufficient quantity to free those mothers who choose to work and provide care for the children of those already lacking reliable facilities for the care of their young children. Moreover the government, viewing responsibility for the supervision and care of children as equally shared by fathers as well as

mothers, considers this provision a measure which will facilitate equality between the sexes.

It is noteworthy that Swedish mothers are reported to prefer day nurseries to other types of care (family day care) "As a service providing the most reliable supervision possible, under the direction of qualified staff and teaching children the rudiments of social behaviour before school age."

While admitting the shortcomings of many present Swedish day nurseries, Anna-Greta Leijon places high hopes in them not only as institutions of child-socialization, but as resources that would mitigate the trauma to children of divorced parents, "...the child can cling to the day nursery as a fixed element in its existence during a period which, in other respects, it must find troublesome".

The matter of day supervision for children of working mothers has been given a high priority in social policy, closely related to labour market policy. The 1968 Riksdag passed a resolution providing for a state



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subsidy, commencing in 1969, amounting to 35 per cent of the costs incurred by local authorities for day supervision in private homes. This new provision somewhat relieves the burden of the local authorities which still pay the major share. The subsidy, in the case of larger municipalities is subject to the condition that at least an equal number of places are available in day nurseries.

There has also been an intensified effort to increase the output of nursery-school teachers. Over the period 1963-1968 the number of places at training colleges has been doubled. The number of places available in 1968 was 1,110. There are plans to have 1,560 places in 1970 and also to recruit male trainees. (In 1966 there was only one male applicant.)

A recently published booklet entitled "A Question of Equality" by the Council of Family Affairs (formerly *Women's Affairs*), of the Swedish Confederation of Trade Unions demanded that 12,000 new nursery places be provided per year, aiming at 100,000 places by 1975. The Confedera-

tion also calls for compulsory kindergarten schooling for all children over the age of five.

Denmark

In Denmark municipalities are legally obliged to provide sufficient day centres and nursery care for their population. While these child care centres are not exclusively for the use of working mothers, the latter are able to make extensive use of them. Full day nurseries are available for infants up to age 2-3. Facilities for children aged 2-3 up to seven years are numerous. Children may remain in these centres for half or full days.

It will be seen from the table below that in the five-year period 1962-1967 the capacity in day nurseries, including some with nursery schools, increased by 10,500 places.

Under the *Children and Young Persons Act, 1964*, children may also be placed in day care with private families. If more than two children are placed with the same family, permission is required from the local

Denmark — Day Care Establishments and Capacity, 1962-1967

Year	Children's Homes		Day Nurseries		Nursery Schools and Play Centres*	
	Est.	Beds	Est.	Cap.	Est.	Cap.
1962	310	8,829	811	35,102	158	8,864
1963	303	8,222	832	35,946	165	9,424
1964	293	7,931	857	36,856	165	9,425
1965	290	7,872	909	38,887	172	9,882
1966	287	7,649	985	41,517	199	10,405
1967	285	7,452	1,089	45,711	188	11,057

* This number excludes Play Centres run without government subsidy.
Source: Yearbook of Nordic Statistics 1968, Table 122.

Child and Youth Welfare Committee, which is responsible for continuous supervision. Arrangements for private day care may be recognized as qualifying for public grants as part of the activities of a day nursery, a nursery school or a recreation centre, or as an independent institution. As yet no data are available on the extent of such day care.¹⁰

Finland

In 1967 there were 754 day care centres. These included crèches and day nurseries for pre-schoolers as well as day homes for school children, with a total number of 34,707 places.

Kindergartens are under the Ministry of Social Welfare, rather than of education as in other countries. They are nevertheless educational in their methods. Under an act of 1927, they may receive one-third of their operating costs from the state if they meet the requirements. In 1967 there were 341 kindergartens, 25 of which were communal and 89 private or semi-private. Two hundred and seventy kindergartens had full-day sections for children of mothers at work. Half-day sections numbered 631. The kin-

dergartens were attended by 22,089 children, of whom 6,504 were in full-day sections. Special kindergartens serve handicapped children such as the mentally retarded, cerebral palsied or children with hearing disabilities. Finland has five training institutes for kindergarten teachers. The one in Helsinki dates back to 1890.

There is an abundance of playgrounds and facilities for outdoor care and recreation in the urban centres. There are summer holiday centres and camps as well as provisions for children to spend summer holidays at private houses in the country.

Norway

The term "daytime institutions, etc." comprises the following: day nurseries (whole day kindergartens), kindergartens, crèches for children under three years of age, leisure homes for school children, family day homes, park-aunt activities, summer holiday camps for children.

Under the act of July 17, 1953, relating to child care, all the above institutions and activities as well as their boards are subject to approval by the Ministry of Social Affairs, or by the person or agency authorized by

Finland — Child Care Centres 1964-1966

Year	Residential Children's Homes		Day Nurseries		Nursery Schools*	
	Est.	Beds	Est.	Cap.	Est.	Cap.
1964	219	5,016	429	11,985	367	17,407
1965	237	5,601	640*	13,679		16,221
1966	236	5,144	692*	15,553		17,602

* Day Nurseries and Nursery Schools without government subsidy are excluded.

Source: Yearbook of Nordic Statistics 1968, Table 122.

Norway — Child Care Facilities 1962-1966

Year	Children's Homes		Summer Camps		Day Nurseries		Nursery Schools	
	Est.	Beds	Est.	Child Rec.	Est.	Cap.	Est.	Cap.
1962	142	2,224	80	6,100				
1963	—	—	—	—	*36	581	392	7,934
1964	142	2,158	—	—	*40	628	402	8,253
1965	—	—	—	—	*55	743	411	8,310
1966	—	—	—	—	*55	681	435	8,828

* Crèches

Source: Yearbook of Nordic Statistics 1968.

the ministry. In 1958 responsibility for daytime institutions for children was transferred to the new Ministry of Family and Consumers' Affairs.

The ministry has delegated to the child welfare boards the authority to approve park-aunts and similar activities as well as summer holiday camps for children according to regulations and instructions from the ministry. The local supervision has been assigned to municipal child welfare boards, and the county supervises all institutions and activities within its area through a child welfare secretary. The ministry is the highest supervisory authority and is also engaged in providing advice and guidance in connection with the development and operation of institutions and activities. This work is carried out by child welfare inspectors.

In 1965 and 1966 the Ministry of Family and Consumer Affairs requested all municipalities above a certain magnitude to prepare a development plan for daytime institutions, playing-grounds for children, etc., which could qualify for state subsidy.

Plans for the construction of daytime institutions could be taken up by private organizations or directly by the municipal

child welfare board through the social agency which is responsible for the running of it.

The ministry has prepared type-drawings for daytime institutions which are supplied to municipalities free of charge. Prefabricated houses, constructed in accordance with the ministry's drawings are supplied by several firms. The ministry has its own professional consultant, an architect, and a special nursery school consultant, who examine the plans and, if satisfied, approve them. The whole plan, including a budget for building and running the institution, is forwarded to the county governor and from him to the ministry for approval.

A daytime institution is divided into sections for children of different age groups (2, 3 or 4 sections) such as a crèche, nursery school, etc. The construction costs of an institution are covered by contributions from the municipality, or a private organization, or both of these jointly, and the state, which pays a contribution amounting to one-third of the construction costs, but not more than kr. 30,000 for each section, which accommodates from eight to 20 children, depending on the children's ages.

The state also pays contributions towards the operation of the institutions, graded according to the financial resources of the municipality (in the same way as for school teachers' salaries). The remainder is covered by the municipality or from parents' fees, and in some cases with contributions from a private organization. The fees for each child may vary from kr. 60 to kr. 200 per month, depending on the operating hours which range from six to nine hours a day. The fees are subject to approval by the ministry.

In addition to the guidance and advice given by the central authorities in matters of development of day-time institutions, two special consultants have been appointed each responsible for covering a certain district of the country and visiting municipalities planning to set up day-time institutions.

The "park aunts" of Norway are persons authorized to look after children of pre-school age in parks and playgrounds. Each park-aunt usually supervises 20 children, but if she has an assistant they may have 30 children under their joint charge. Children aged 2-7 are entitled to have this service. While activities are based on open air, there is usually a shelter or little house. The activities are carried out throughout the year unless forbidden by the "clerk of the weather". Park-aunts are not required to have any formal training. Their qualifications include knowing how to care for children and the principles of first aid. While this service does not replace a day nursery or a kindergarten, it is an excellent means of providing young children with a healthful social activity and releasing mothers or relatives who may care for children of working or student mothers for several hours each day.

FOOTNOTES

- ¹ Barbara Chisholm, "A Report on A Question About Day Care", *Canadian W* Nov./Dec. 1967.
- ² For a summary of the interest of international agencies in the subject of day care, see Sjölin, "Care of Well Children in Day Centres", in *Care of Children in Day Centres*, W.H.O., Public Health Paper Geneva, 1964, pp. 9-31.
- ³ For a review and reassessment of the literature regarding maternal deprivation, separation, hospitalism with reference to day care, see Milton Willner, "Day Care: A Reassessment", *Child Welfare*, XLIV:3, March 1965, pp. 133.
- ⁴ Mrs. George Stewart, in *Child Welfare*, XLVII:4, April 1968, p. 207, "Day Care: Under-Used Resource in Child Welfare" presses a similar viewpoint stating that "we would have thought that social workers have been amongst the first people to promote day care because of its preventive diagnostic and therapeutic values in relation to welfare services". Elsewhere she points out that 90 per cent of all federal (U.S.) welfare money goes to full-time foster care. Also V. G. Gilfillian, "Day Care as a Therapeutic Service to Preschool Children", *Child Welfare*, XLI:9, Nov. 9, 1962, pp. 411. Gilfillian sees the Day Care "Centre" (Victorian Day Nursery, Toronto), as the means of bringing families together and strengthening family units by enhancing parental capabilities, improving functional ability of children, mental, physical, neurological and mixed abilities.
- ⁵ S. Lebovici, in W.H.O., *Care of Children in Day Centres*, Public Health Papers 24, Geneva, 1964, p. 82.
- ⁶ Canada, Department of Labour, *Work Mothers and Their Child-care Arrangements*, Queen's Printer, 1970, p. 14.
- ⁷ For a survey of Private Kindergartens and Nursery Schools in Canada, 1969-1970, D.B.S. Catalogue, 81-221, May 1970.
- ⁸ Anna-Greta Leijon, *Swedish Women — Swedish Men*, Stockholm, The Swedish Institute, 1967, p. 91.
- ⁹ Ulla-Britta Bruun has pointed out that occasionally three-year olds are admitted but because of the long lists of children waiting for admission, the majority of districts take only six-year olds. Groups of 20 children are seen in one classroom by one teacher, one group between 9 and 12 a.m. and another between 1 and 4 p.m. In 1964, the numbers seen represented only 20 percent of eligible children.
- ¹⁰ *Social Security in the Nordic Countries*, "Expenditure On and Scope of Certain Social Security Measures" (1966/67), Copenhagen, 1970, p. 140.

